

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Linda J. Walton Medical Library Association President, 2014–2015

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Linda J. Walton, the Medical Library Association's (MLA's) 2014–2015 president, is a great person to know. I have been privileged to know her via MLA, through her work in two Regional Medical Library (RML) programs, and on the job (she served as associate director at the Galter Health Sciences Library when I served as the

library director). She has energy, warmth, humor, and a smart sense about people and is practical, almost to a fault. She is a committed professional with genuine concerns about issues facing librarianship in general and the medical library profession in particular. A telling characteristic is that she speaks her mind, usually in a way that a

listener can appreciate (once they get over the shock of her startling questions or comments). This polite bluntness often advances the point of the conversation because more than anything else, Linda is all about getting things done. More on these characteristics later, but first it is worthwhile to understand where MLA's next president came from and what produced these special characteristics.

Linda is a true child of the Midwest. A native of Crawfordsville, Indiana, Linda's roots are pure American on both sides of the family. While she is not into genealogical research, she knows her families' lineages go back generations to colonial times. Like recent MLA presidents (Dixie A. Jones, AHIP, Ruth Holst, AHIP, FMLA, and Mark E. Funk, AHIP, FMLA), Linda hails from small-town America. Crawfordsville is in west central Indiana, and even though it is a small town (the city government brags that it regularly appears in the list of "the top 100 best small towns in America" [1]), it has several claims to fame: it is the home of Wabash College, a highly ranked, all male (still!) liberal arts college; it is the home of Lew Wallace, author of *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*; and more importantly to basketball fans, Crawfordsville lays claim to hosting Indiana's first official basketball game in 1894 and the state's first intercollegiate basketball game (Wabash versus Purdue), also in 1894 [2]. (For those who don't know, basketball is Indiana's state "religion.") In other words, Crawfordsville is not a bad place to live. Still, Linda wasn't buying it: she wanted to get out of town so she could see the world. Education was her exit route.

Linda's first exit out of Crawfordsville was attending college at Indiana University (IU). Close to home and affordable (with a Pell

Grant and an Indiana State Scholarship), Linda pursued her education, majoring in comparative literature and telecommunications. Her choices, however, did not impress her father, who, according to Linda, said, "You can enjoy reading while standing in the unemployment line." Given that perspective, Linda decided graduate school would offer a career with better job prospects. Linda entered IU's library science program right after college (1979–1980). Why library science? A cousin who was a librarian influenced her to enter the profession. The program also offered easy admission because IU alumni did not have to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).

After graduation came her first professional position at the Indiana State Library in Indianapolis. At the state library, Linda did basic reference work and research for the Indiana History Division. During this stint, Linda met her husband Steve and got married. Linda and Steve moved to Providence, Rhode Island, so Steve could pursue his doctoral degree in American history at Brown University. They started their family in Providence with daughter Claire in 1987, followed by son Matt in 1990. In Providence, Linda first encountered medical librarianship at Butler Hospital (1984–1991). She chose this position over a competitor, a political position in the state law library, because she figured she would have shorter, more flexible hours in a medical library than a law library. The hospital library position opened doors for the rest of her career. Linda was always a "joiner," even in high school, so the opportunity to connect and network through MLA's North Atlantic Health Sciences Libraries chapter was advantageous in the short run in her role as hospital librarian. The Butler Hospital position also gave her exposure to the RML program. From Linda's perspective, the New England RML provided new challenges beyond what she gained from working in a hospital library. The opportunity to do new things and meet new people was an impetus

to change positions and advance her career when she accepted the associate director position in the New England RML (1991–1994). Her time in New England also introduced her to something not as readily available in the Midwest: seafood, now a forever favorite. Over time, both the New England and the Greater Midwest RMLs became the focus of a major portion of her career.

Moving back to the Midwest in the mid-1990s happened as a result of her husband's teaching career. While Steve took positions in the University of Wisconsin system, Linda became the associate director of the Greater Midwest RML (1994–1996). The commute between rural Wisconsin and the University of Illinois at Chicago campus became a major strain, so Linda gave up this position in order to work closer to home. She landed a job working for the state Area Health Education Center (AHEC) (1996–1997). Unfortunately, this experience proved to be a low point in her career. The AHEC position involved more administration than librarianship, and Linda faced some serious challenges with a difficult supervisor. While Wisconsin was not a happy time for her, it did provide close proximity to new career opportunities, namely back in Chicago. Linda took advantage to get back into academia via the associate director position at Northwestern University (1997–2006). This time, Linda's career took priority, and Steve did the commuting while the family settled in Evanston, Illinois.

Her Northwestern tenure proved to be a great opportunity as the position offered exciting challenges. As the associate director, Linda was responsible for staffing, personnel issues, and other library operations. As second in command, Linda had her hand in familiar work: meeting with staff, setting service goals, and planning budgets. Working for a private university was also a new experience. Funding was good, staffing was great, and medical school leadership was supportive. A big challenge facing academic medical libraries was making

the transition from print to electronic publications. Linda was enthusiastic about changing the focus of the Galter Library collections. She rallied staff around her to make the transition, worked with several publishers to obtain "big deals" that introduced faculty and students to the benefits of electronic publications, and worked with staff to shape the library's website as the primary focus of delivering the electronic library to users. (As Galter staff were wont to say: "The website is the library.")

Linda's time at Northwestern also offered the possibility of new challenges for her career. As she completed many library projects and observed how decision making takes place in a research-intensive medical school, she started to think more strategically about her career and began planning her advancement toward a library directorship. The new National Library of Medicine (NLM)/Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) Leadership Fellowship program [3] provided the educational opportunity that Linda needed to get the ball rolling toward career advancement. Linda was in the first class of fellows for this important new boost for medical library leadership. Wayne J. Peay, FMLA, librarian emeritus, Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library, University of Utah, served as Linda's mentor during the fellowship. Wayne commented: "As a member of the first cohort of fellows, it was a learning experience for all concerned." The University of Utah and the State of Utah provided Linda a different environment from a well-endowed private institution and the metropolitan Chicago area. The fellowship offered an opportunity for two strong personalities to exchange perspectives, sometimes vigorously, and end up with a real friendship. Wayne remarked, "Our hike out to see the Great Salt Lake and a wild buffalo herd sealed the deal for us." However, the prospect of becoming a director produced some internal stress: moving up in her career would mean a major disruption for her family as it meant relocation to a new environment,

new schools for the children, and new job prospects for her husband. Though many director vacancies became available across the country, Linda passed them by until her children were out of high school and starting their own lives. When the University of Iowa directorship became available, Linda was ready. It seemed fitting for Linda to get this position as she succeeded her late friend and predecessor, both at Iowa and at the Greater Midwest RML, Jean Williams Sayre.

All during her career advances, Linda maintained her "joiner" attitude, especially regarding academic and MLA activities. Wherever she worked, Linda participated in the life of the institution. Most of her academic activities centered on collection development in libraries. Other institutional committee appointments included review work for the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) and technology implementation projects or curriculum-related teams. As the result of her collection development interests, NLM appointed her to the Literature Selection Technical Review Committee from 2008 to 2012, where she continues to serve as a consultant. Her RML experiences led to appointments on various RML committees. Linda also gained a reputation as a successful grant writer. In addition to working on multiple RML contracts for two regions, she wrote many grants that provided funds to support innovative projects. These projects varied from women's health to technology implementation and evaluation to the history of medicine. In MLA, Linda has served on numerous committees at the national, chapter, and section levels. Wherever Linda worked, she got involved in the local library groups: in Rhode Island, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Illinois. All these experiences built her national reputation, and her service work culminated in her election to the MLA Board of Directors in 2006. She served until 2009, including two years as MLA treasurer. Finally, she was elected MLA president-elect in 2013.

So what does this professional life portend? Like the rest of the

MLA membership, Linda has experienced a professional life full of change. She has learned not to approach change with caution, but to accept it, make something of it, and take charge. Her presidential goals reflect this approach. Linda will lead MLA to explore new professional roles that result from this ever-changing environment, to reexamine credentialing in an effort to recognize new expertise among the membership, and to relearn and rethink advocacy at the local level rather than only at the government level. She is an advocate for understanding, using, and collecting data for assessment and for measuring quality improvement that demonstrates the value of the health information professional. Linda also hopes to lead MLA toward new partnerships with allied organizations, especially those who also face challenges in understanding and using big data.

As for Linda's character, she has many fine qualities. Linda is a "fixer." She sees problems and issues and immediately thinks of ways to fix things. This leadership quality will influence her approach to her presidency. Another characteristic is her resiliency. She has relied on her inner strength, as well as her health information expertise and knowledge of how health institutions operate, whenever she had to address the health issues facing her immediate family, parents, and in-laws. These health issues have been daunting and frequent, but Linda survives them and carries on. Linda is persistent in getting what she wants. This is not to say she is "pushy"; rather, she is firm because she knows that what she wants will also be good for others. Above all else, she is always practical. This makes her a compromiser in a true sense of the word, because her goal is the greater good. Another characteristic is that Linda is not fond of doing things because they have always been done a certain way. Tradition is not a justification for her. In fact, using tradition as a defense is a sure way to get her "fixer" juices flowing to the max.

A special characteristic is her sense of humor. She is not a jokester, but she laughs easily, heartily, and often. She is also tolerant and patient but up to a point. Bureaucratic inanities get her eyes rolling and her ire up. Her good friend and colleague, Judy Consales, the associate university librarian, director of the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, and director of the Pacific Southwest RML at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), describes Linda as a "realist." She comments:

Linda and I have a similar scope of responsibilities in our current positions because we both oversee additional libraries other than health sciences. Despite the time difference between the west coast and Iowa, we are often thinking simultaneously about a topic of the moment and a "call me" from Linda pops up in my email just as I was about to reach for the phone to call her with my thoughts about a particular issue. I'm always delighted to hear her no nonsense take on these subjects and feel grateful to have a friend who is also questioning the way we have always done things as a justification for following timeworn models. Linda is a realist—not an optimist or pessimist. This attribute will allow her to represent MLA to the best of her abilities and aptitudes.

Linda's MLA presidency comes at an interesting time. Many of her colleagues have started the move toward retirement, so she will be doing what she has always done in MLA: looking to meet new people to replace those no longer close by her. She knows that physical libraries are being questioned and challenged; she has faced these challenges herself at the University of Iowa. Linda knows that now is the time to focus on changing MLA through the position of the librarian. This is particularly tough without an institutional anchor, but that is the challenge facing the medical library profession. Linda believes that the time for reinventing the medical librarian is now. The exact nature of this reinvention is only now beginning to take shape, and it offers exciting and challenging roles for medical librarians of the future. As Linda is wont

to do, she is joining up and moving ahead to lead the change.

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